

# Mawdūdī's Critique of the Secular Mind

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At the beginning of the twentieth century, a series of changes accumulating during the past two centuries in the Western world began to crystallize into a new outlook that pulsed with a creative rhythm and extended itself into the far reaches of the world. At the same time, the Ottomans, the last vestige of Muslim power whose writ stretched from the Middle East to North Africa and the Balkans, were in the throes of exhaustion, heaving desperately for a lease on life that the West would mercilessly deny them.

South Asia had already seen the demise of Muslim preeminence and had lived in the shadow of British colonial rule for some time. For people like Mawdūdī, it was a traumatic experience, and each day that passed deepened his agony. In its essence, it was not just the change from Muslim to British rule, but a cataclysmic subversion of the sociopolitical order, an invasion of foreign ideas that was eroding the very basis of Islamic society. This situation was made worse by the fact that the British saw the Hindus as natural allies<sup>1</sup> and together, they manipulated the post 1857 situation in South Asia to marginalize Muslims into a political and economic nonentity. The fall of Muslim power, the loss of their moral leadership, and the eventual decimation of their civilization saddened Mawdūdī.

Mawdūdī knew that the military occupation of Muslim lands was a temporary phenomenon and might not last long. He saw the real threat as Western thought, which, after de-Christianizing, was now in a position to swallow the Muslims. For the colonial West, it was important that the fall of Muslim power should have its sequel in the conquest of the Muslim soul. Mawdūdī saw the peril in the situation and decided to respond to it in three ways: by understanding Western thought, establishing Islam's supremacy, and by restoring the morale of the Muslims.

Not having had the benefit of formal education in a university, Mawdūdī worked hard to learn English and then read as much as he could to familiarize himself with the matrix of the invading culture. Long before the 1930s, when

Mawdūdī came into his prime, the West had cast religion aside by submitting to the sovereignty of science. The world was no more located in God's omnipotence, nor was it explainable through revelatory knowledge but only through man's sensory experiences, explainable through a mechanistic materialism. Einstein and Planck's non-material view would take some time before it made its presence felt.

These were the days of Darwin, Marx and Freud, whose theories and interpretations ruled everything. The three had demolished the long-held belief that humans were noble in creation and that there was a purpose to existence. The evolutionists rejected this as an anthropocentric delusion. By eliminating the providential design, they had stripped life of cosmic meaning. Freud, who had probed human consciousness, declared it a fragile epiphenomenon determined by dark hostile forces residing in the unconscious. Humans were therefore not even rational, a notion that had been trumpeted during the Enlightenment. Added to this, the new cosmology reduced the significance of the earth by describing it as a much smaller planet in the overall universe. Together, the three not only took away man's nobility, but also questioned his humanity by viewing him as just another animal. The emergent worldview in the West was horrifically opposed to everything that Islam stood for. Mawdūdī therefore turned his attention to rationalism, positivism, Darwinian evolution, and secular humanism as expressed by Marx.

## **Rationalism or Attitudes of Servitude**

Before Mawdūdī could take on Darwin and others, it was important for him to expose the shallowness of the Muslim educated class, which believed wholeheartedly in the supremacy of the West. He wrote:

Even where Muslims are free and sovereign, their freedom is illusory as they suffer from mental servitude — their academic institutions, their offices, their bazaars, their homes, and even their bodies speak of the West's stamp on them. Whether knowingly or not, they think with borrowed minds, see things through borrowed eyes and tread borrowed paths. They have this notion mounted on them that the West alone has the truth. All else is false. Thus, their manners, their standards of decency and morality are of Western origin. Whatever satisfies this yardstick, they take as true.<sup>2</sup>

For sure, this was a frontal attack on attitudes of servitude. Rationality, as claimed by educated Muslims, was in reality an imitation of the West, which involved little reflection or analysis. But before he could put them on the defensive, he wanted to tell them that the West in general is not that rational. "The secularists," Mawdūdī said, "disputed God's presence, and called for a probe in the universe without Him. In their view, any effort that allies itself

with a transcendent God is unscientific. Small wonder, new scholarship in the West had a taint of prejudice against God, spiritualism and metaphysics. Driven by emotions and not reason, they disputed God's presence not because they had proved His absence through scientific inquiry. Rather, they denied Him because He was the God of their opponents who were hostile to their liberalism. Their subsequent five centuries of work had this irrational attitude behind it."<sup>3</sup>

In his famous piece on "The Finitude of Rationalism," Mawdūdī delved further into the subject:

For the last two centuries, the West has projected itself as a believer in rationalism and naturalism. The rest of the world took it seriously because in make-believe who can deny the power spread of a billboard approach? Anything perceived repetitively has an assured stay in our memory, and thus may engineer our thinking towards its acceptance. Small wonder, we now believe that Western civilization rests on the twin concepts of rationalism and naturalism, though in essence it seeks the validity of its mental attitudes in sensory experiences and the impulsion of desire. For some, it may be news that even the much talked about Enlightenment in the West was essentially a mutiny against rationalism. And so was the case with naturalism when it overthrew nature-based guidance and embraced desire and empiricism as its guide. In other words, anything that failed in the scale of utility was worth the contempt.<sup>4</sup>

To Mawdūdī, the mind-based utilitarian criterion was nothing but positivism, which equated reality with tangibility, weight, and calculation. What this meant was that things that were beyond observation and experience bore no existential worth in the calculus of utility nor could they be believable, for they fell within the realm of irrationality. That being the case, for Mawdūdī it was proper to go after the concept of utilitarian benefits because Western educated Muslims had begun to weigh even Islamic injunctions on the utilitarian scale.

By definition, a rational and utilitarian benefit is incapable of a precise import because of its relative nature. A person may consider something as useful while others see it as injurious. A third person may hold it partially useful but of less significance, while regarding something else as profitable. In judging utility, the chances for disagreement abound as every person could have a different perspective on it. A person may crave for the immediate gain while avoiding injury in it. For sure, his choice will be at variance with others who have their eyes set on its functional utility. Likewise, there are things which may occasion both benefit and harm. A person may go for it because he is willing to engage in harm for the sake of its long-term benefit. Others

may shy away from it for it entails more harm than benefit. Again, rational and utilitarian benefits may disagree with each other. For example, experience may suggest harm in a thing but our rational mind could summon up bigger gains in the future. Also, experience may prove a thing beneficial, but our rational mind could insist on discarding it. Such being the high state of subjectivity, a thing may vary in its value among the people.<sup>5</sup>

Mawdūdī sought to expose the shallow affliction with reason of the new converts to rationalism in Muslim societies and the exaggerated importance they gave to it as a scientific tool, unaffected by prejudice or emotions:

Making claims of reason-based life notwithstanding, our so-called rationalists violate its dictates every inch of the way in its application to life. Mentally wanting, they fail to grasp the ungraceful union of the opposites and their consequential contrariness. Education could have helped by favoring them with the basic implements of a rational mind and freeing them from a tangled speech. . . . Inconsistent in their premise and their argumentation, it is chaos that rules their minds. Worse still, the civilizational context, which situates the human self, is not helpful to them either, as it is given to sensuality and material pursuits. It can activate desires in humans making them voracious consumers; it can also create a sensory self entangled with the known, but gifting them a trained mind that shies away from dabbling in superficialities is beyond its genius. Mostly in their case posing rational is an affect and not reality. Again, it is on Islam alone that their much-paraded rationalism comes into play, for it is in the spiritual, moral and societal postulates of Islam that the Western concepts run into problems.<sup>6</sup>

Mawdūdī was not far from the truth. The ability to reason is human distinction, though it has innate problems. To begin with, it has to operate within a social given. It resides in a human vessel, which has a psycho-temporal construct. Thus, what affects humans also affects reason. Besides, reason cannot be the arbiter for everything. It does not function in a trajectory of linear progression; often it has to move in a web, and is likely to get bogged down.

Mawdūdī considered it irrational for a person to question his faith after having accepted it. This does not mean he cannot question its postulates or argue its validity with others. He can certainly do this, but that should be before coming into the fold of Islam. Once, however, he accepts it, he must embrace it wholeheartedly. This does not preclude seeking justificatory explanation for an injunction, but it will be neither rational nor practical if every now and then a person seeks justification for a rule as a condition for its compliance. Mawdūdī elaborates this point by putting it in the civilizational context:

Civilization presupposes that when a person agrees to a system, he must have approved its basic presumptions. Belief in the sovereign command of that system, and submission to its dictates are an essential mix of a collective life. As long as one stays in a setup, he has to follow the sovereign will. Criminal neglect or rule violation is another thing, for he can still live within the setup after infracting its rules. But if every now and then he seeks justificatory explanation to a rule as conditional to its compliance, he can be charged with rebellion. If he is in the army, court martial will be his fate. If he is enrolled in an educational institution, he will be thrown out of it. If he is already in the fold of a faith, he will invite the charge of disbelief. For such seekers of justificatory explanations, the right place will be out of its pale and not inside. To merit an answer, one must step out and then question.<sup>7</sup>

To expose the much-paraded rationality of the so-called Muslim rationalists, Mawdudi suggests a small rationality test. "Draw them into discussion on a subject. Then as a preliminary to the discussion, ask them to affirm their essence [would they be participating in it as Muslims or nonbelievers?], and then cite the religious injunction applicable to the subject. Probably they would shrug their shoulders and say in the vein of their assumed rationality: 'Keep your mullaism to yourself; give us a reason-based answer and not a textual citation.' These may be a few words, but it surely reveals their irrationality. It gives them no credit that they know either the essentials of demanding attestation or the true posturing of a seeker. With failing as large, where do they fault?"<sup>8</sup>

An argument often made was that religion had become outdated because of the new thought on the brain horizon. Another equally potent notion was the fashionable tendency to narrow down knowledge to sensory experiences, since they are quantifiable. Mawdūdī thrashed out these notions at three levels: First, he took up the morphology of the emergent knowledge by pointing to the possibility of its being conjectural and conceptual; second, he demonstrated the absurdity of the claim that experimental methods have replaced faith; third, he showed that people even in present times believe in the unseen. Zipping through the secularists' argument, Mawdūdī says,

To change religion in the wake of new thought is the hallmark of those who think that every development is constitutive of knowledge, and that it is in synch with time to embrace it. Whether the emergent thought is of a conjectural and conceptual nature, or whether its soundness has been probed with academic rectitude does not bother them. Superficial as such, they get carried away with the 'blazing trails of new thinking,' even though they know little how new thought crystallize and which ways are wise and which childish.<sup>9</sup>

## Darwinian Evolution — Dogma or Science

By the time Darwin arrived on the scene, the West had already cast the universe into a new model of spatial dimension. Christianity was still a force, but gone was its preeminent authority to understand nature. The Cartesian–Newton vantage had begun to evidence its secularizing consequences. For Darwin, the moment had come to effectuate a complete breakaway from religious tradition and explain the universe through adaptation and natural selection. In the process, a new paradigm arose. For the next century, the science community made Darwin their icon.<sup>10</sup>

Responding in the 1930s to a question from a student who felt his faith crumbling before the might of Darwinian evolution, Mawdūdī came up with his short critique on Darwin. It was concise and went to the heart of the problem by making a differentiation between theory and law. “The difference between hypothesis and law is very important for a theory that does not cohere with facts has no stay, but truth has. The question of reviewing one’s faith rises only when it comes into conflict with a proven truth. A faith that cowers before speculative thought and unproven theories is not worth the claim of faith but is rather a fond hope that decays by mere rumors.”<sup>11</sup>

As a theist, Mawdūdī believed that the complexity and variance in life, from the unicellular molecule to a full-blown human form, was not accidental or random but rather had an exceptional order behind it. The universe, said Mawdūdī, is the outcome of a mastermind who helped different organisms grow in a correspondingly compatible environment and then gradually nudged them toward species of differentiated characteristics. If in God’s plan some species became unwanted, He phased them out. In contrast, Darwinians observed nature through the blinkered lens of a godless mind, which attributed life on earth to the self-organizing ability of atoms. Darwin’s theory, he maintained, became handy for such a mind. “European atheism by then, though under full steam, still lacked a solid scientific base. Written in scientific jargon and seemingly plausible, his theory received a ready embrace as it provided atheism its wooden legs. Suddenly it made them understand the so-far-elusive reality. Without much reflection, they fixed the theory’s wooden legs to every discipline from the sciences to philosophy and from ethics to the humanities, although it carried serious flaws in its interpretation of physical phenomena.”<sup>12</sup>

Darwin himself admitted his inability to account for intermediate forms in the course of evolution. His most fervent supporter, Julian Huxley, rated *The Origin of the Species* a great book. “First of all,” said he, “. . . it provides a vast and well-chosen body of evidence showing that existing animals and plants cannot have been created separately in their present forms, but *must have*

evolved from earlier forms by slow transformation.”<sup>13</sup> Mawdūdī considered the reliance on phrases such as, “must have evolved” to be unscientific.

## **Hegel's and Marx's View of History**

Mawdūdī is critical of modern civilization for, in his view, it has brought in its fold a horde of problems for humanity that have their roots in Hegelian historiography. Karl Marx added to the human travail by building his materialist interpretation of history on the dialectical process envisioned by Hegel.

So what is this Hegelian historiography that Mawdūdī blames? In the succinct style that sets him apart from others, Mawdūdī summarizes Hegel's thought in the following manner,

A civilization moves upward when contradictions, conflicts and amalgamations surface in the human situation. Hegel held every historical epoch as an organic whole like a living body system, in which all aspects of human existence — economic, political, social and moral — are in a measured proportion, marked by a relationship of symbiosis and pulsing with a similar rhythm. Taken together, each epoch objectifies the spirit of the age.

When a great epoch reaches its full potential because of its life-giving ideas, then something unusual takes place. From within its womb an opposite force emerges in the form of new concepts and thought, and these begin to take on the old thought.

For a while this conflict between the old and the new eras continues. But eventually they agree to a marriage giving birth to a newer civilization. And thus begins the fresh phase of history. Hegel describes this process of evolution as dialectical. To him, in the flow of history there is a perpetual exchange and conflict, which is not haphazard but logical: First thesis comes and then as a counter to it antithesis comes. The strife invites the ‘World Reason’ or ‘Absolute Spirit’ to move in for a patch up by taking the best from both of the rivals to create a synthesis. In due course, the new synthesis itself turns into thesis and thus the cycle of conflict as well as resolution continues.<sup>14</sup>

To Hegel, says Mawdūdī, the dialectical process is collective by its essence and total in its embrace. This means that an epoch is like a single living unit while individuals and groups are its organs. None of them is free from the epoch's collective temper, including great historical figures that are nothing but pawns on the chessboard. In the turbulent flow of this mighty river, the “Absolute Idea” surges magisterially to produce thesis, antithesis, and finally synthesis. In this process, as Hegel visualizes it, there is a manifest irony. The “Absolute Idea” or “World Reason” gives individuals and groups an illusion of

participation in the dialectic of change, making them believe that they are the real movers and shakers in this historical play. But, in fact, the “World Reason” uses them in the realization of itself. For it, it is an act of becoming.

After discussing Hegelian historiography, Mawdūdī sums up Marx’s ideas with his characteristic brevity, “Fascinated by Hegelian reason, Karl Marx picked up its dialectical process minus its spiritual or ideational aspect and replaced it with material stimulants as the basis of historical evolution.”<sup>15</sup>

In this Marxian vision, states Mawdūdī, the sole determinant of human life is the economy. The economic system shapes the whole civilization of an era, its laws, ethics, religion, arts, and philosophy. The dialectical process in the Marxist conception expresses itself in history when under an economic system a class of people takes hold of the means of production and reduces others to abject dependence. When this happens, the oppressed classes gradually grow restive and, in consequence, ask for a counter system of property relations and distribution of goods that serves their interests. This development of a festering schism in the existing body politic is the antithesis of the old system. As the conflict intensifies, the current corpus of law, religion and other concepts finding themselves in jeopardy become supportive of the oppressive system. While the emergent classes, which seek the replacement of the existing economic system, reject established “truths,” and seek to impart new values.

To Marx, all changes of history and the evolution of human civilization are attributable to the means of production and their distribution. What gives impulse to this process is class conflict. Marx also argued that there are no enduring values of human civilization, religion and ethics describable as objective truth. Rather, it is human nature to first choose for itself a model to further its material interests and then to justify its continuance, manufacture a new religion and a new philosophy of ethics. This self-centered conflict is in line with nature. If there is a basis for accommodation, it is in the confluence of economic interests. Those who are opposed to such a confluence, call for strife.

Mawdūdī discounted the possibility that one could be a believer and a Marxist at the same time, characterizing this as a super contradiction and a pathetic situation. It is not all error that Mawdūdī sees in Hegel. To him, Hegel’s philosophy of history is correct to the extent that the evolution of human civilization has been possible because of the conflict between contradictory ideas and their subsequent resolution. But along with this brilliant grasp of history, Mawdūdī argues that Hegel introduces other concepts which have no basis. For example, Hegel describes God as the “World Spirit” and states that God is using humans to complete himself. Consequently, the history of human development is God’s quest for becoming. According to Mawdūdī, this aspect of Hegel’s dialectic is pure fantasy.



Mawdūdī describes flaws in the Hegelian system as being like a jigsaw puzzle. “Even his dialectical process, despite its aspects of truth, is highly speculative. For example, he does not substantiate it from history. Nor does he show us the precise nature of the conflict between opposites, and how the resolution takes place between the two warring sets of ideas. He is equally short on telling us why the new amalgamation of thought gives birth to a fresh enemy entity. This calls for an exhaustive treatment of the subject, but he hovers over it like a bird and then flies to other pastures.”<sup>16</sup>

But if Hegel in his view lacks solidity, Marx is superficial. “The latter,” says he, “makes no effort to understand human nature and its makeup. Admittedly, Marx is quick in comprehending the exterior animal that has economic needs, but he does not break into the inside of man, his human core for which the outer animal is the implement. Nor does Marx understand the demands of human nature, which are different from the temperament of the outer animal.”

This aspect of Marx’s work, says Mawdūdī, is extremely shaky and exposes the falsity of his sociology. Marx thinks that the human self is the slave of the animal self. The power of his rational faculties and observation, creativity and intuitive apparatus are all in the service of the exterior animal. “To Marx, the inside human can do nothing but submit to the will of the outer entity — make laws as he wishes, cook up religious concepts and lay down the course of his destiny as he dictates. How corrupt is the Marxist view of humanity? How lowly is his civilizational concept?”<sup>17</sup>

Mawdūdī does not disregard, however, the effect of animal impulses on the human self. Nor would it be possible to deny that the animal self strives for supremacy over the human self. But Marx is wrong, says Mawdūdī, when he claims that the animal self is free from the influence of the human self. His reading of history is totally wrong when he comes up with the statement that civilizations owe their growth to individuals ruled, not by their humanity, but by their animal selves. “A little objectivity,” says Mawdūdī, “would have helped Marx know that the enduring values of civility, ethics, and justice are the legacy of those individuals who tamed their animal selves to increase the human capital.”<sup>18</sup>

## **The Alternative View**

Having made his critique of current theories about the place of humans in the world, Mawdūdī offers his counterview of Islam. According to the Qur’ān, says Mawdūdī, man is not the name of the biological self alone that houses hunger, sex, greed, fear and wrath, it is also the carrier of a spiritual essence that pulsates with moral impulses. Unlike other animals, humans are not bound by instinct, but have been endowed with intelligence, discretion, and the ability to acquire knowledge and make decisions as autonomous beings.

God does not force individuals to walk on a predetermined path. Nor does God take full charge of human subsistence. On the contrary, He has empowered them with striving so that they can live by the sweat of their brows, realize their potentials, and obtain for themselves what they want. Man is the name of that ability to strive as an autonomous self.<sup>19</sup>

As for the exterior animal self — an uncouth agent that has nothing but desires and lusts to pursue — God has placed it in the service of the inner human. When charged, it tries to reverse the order and take hold of the human self so that it serves baser demands through harnessing mental endowments. It attempts to weigh down the human ability to soar, limits its vision, and stokes the fire of *jābiliyyah* in him. In response to the cadence of his soul, the human self asserts his domain over the animal self. In this respect, he has at his disposal the revelational knowledge of justness and piety, right and wrong. Even when he responds to the urging of his instincts, he seeks rightful ways of satisfying them. His aspirations are far higher than the earthly pulls of his animal self. He wants to be good in his own eyes and in the eyes of his God. His intuition prompts him to excel as a moral being.

Consequently, Mawdūdī says, the whole history of humanity is a reflection of this conflict between the human self and his counterpart animal self. He wants to follow the prompting of his intuition, while the animal self pulls him downward in directions that are harmful, laden with self indulgence, discord, lust and iniquity. Once derailed, he tries to haul himself up, but in the process, selects some wrong solutions under the influence of the animal self. He seeks sanctuary in monastic life, in the rigors of denying self, and in escape from civilizational responsibilities. But instead of increasing his hold on the animal self, this uncalled for withdrawal from life again sets him on wrong paths. This time, the animal self makes sure that he stays astray forever. Mawdūdī states,

The two forces of extremism (that is monasticism and materialism) continue in a tug of war tearing apart the human fabric of existence. Under each impact, some new concepts and thoughts generate, carrying part truth part falsehood. For a while, humanity tests these amalgams of thoughts until it tires itself out. Man's true nature, which longs for the straight path (*sirāt al-mustaqīm*), surfaces again and after a reflective phase of contrition, while retaining the right elements, flushes the false ones out.<sup>20</sup>

## Secularism and its Toll

With those kinds of mortars and bricks in the making of Western civilization, it did not surprise people like Mawdūdī that the West's prime values of secularism, nationalism and democracy were problematic. The three,

in his view, constituted the triangle of calamity that shadows humanity today.<sup>21</sup> Mawdūdī states that the West's insistence that God should make no intrusion in the secular realm was a reactive response to the clergy-made theology, which bore heavily on its psyche by manacling its freedom and growth. Mawdūdī describes the one-liner cliché "religion is a private matter between God and man" as "the *kalimah* (the creedal declaration)" of present-day civilization. What this implies is that if a person's conscience allows for God's existence, he or she may worship Him in private but must keep the secular realm free from the influence of religion. In consequence, every form of temporal relations — education, business, law, politics or international relations — have torn themselves from the religious grid. Decisions are made free from value input or, in other words, one situational mediated by the human self.<sup>22</sup> Mawdūdī laments the fact that even individual life has been increasingly fashioned into a secular mold because of non-Godly education and irreligious social thrusts. Personal testimony of God's existence and His worship now remain undeclared, especially from those who are the real shakers and movers of this new civilization.

Mawdūdī describes the secular project of excluding God from the public space as irrational,

Either God is the master-creator of humans and the universe or He is not. If He is neither the creator nor master nor sovereign, then why have Him even in one's private life. But if He is our Lord and the creator and the sovereign of this universe, it makes little sense to slash His jurisdiction to the private sphere and thus oust Him from the authoritative public space. Likewise, if God has made this demarcation, it must go back to Divine provenance for proof. In case it is human drawn, the act would be seditious against their creator and sovereign. Thus, could there be a more absurd thing to say that every individual in his private life is God's creature but when the same individuals come together in a social melding, they cease to be His creatures? Again as separate units, each individual is God's creature but when together in fusion, they are not? Only an insane person can conceive this kind of aberrance.<sup>23</sup>

Enlarging on the theme, Mawdūdī writes: "Absurd as this mental posturing is, one may ask if we need God and His guidance neither in our family life, nor in our neighborhoods and our cities, then why stay with Him? Likewise, it will be equally absurd to believe in Him if His guidance is of no consequence to us neither in work and marketplace, nor in the courts and government corridors, or in peace and war. . . . Why should we worship a God who is incapable of guiding us in our existential complexities? On the other hand, He is so short on brains (Allah forgive us) that in not a single matter His guidance makes any sense."<sup>24</sup>

Equally problematic is the notion of splitting life into private and public realms. He says what people call private life is a nonentity, for humans are born in a civilized ambience with an inescapable collective shade. They are products of a social union between a mother and a father; they eye their first daylight in the lap of their parents. As they grow into adulthood, they find themselves dealing with society and its body corporate. The countless linkages that connect humans with others, he thinks, have to be sound in their constitution for it is a prelude to their well-being. Such sound and fair values of interconnectivity can come from God alone. Mawdūdī states, “When humans fracture themselves from the Divine guidance, they face their own chaotic desires; social ethos suffer from instability, while justice and fair play surrender to turmoil.”<sup>25</sup> This is similar to what Russell Kirk said years later, “The sanction for obedience to norms must come from a source higher than private speculation: men do not submit long to their creations. Standards erected out of expediency will be hurled down, soon enough, also out of expediency.”<sup>26</sup>

Mawdūdī describes well the problem that secularism creates for the individual as well as society:

A society that binds itself to secularism recedes into a valueless fluidity in which desires rule, pushing every aspect of human relations under the shade of inequity and distrust with an overlay of class and ethno-national considerations. From relations between two individuals to relations between nations, not a single link is distortion free. Unmindful of repercussions on others, individuals as well as groups and nations have framed rules in their realm of authority. In this jungle, if there is a force that can restrain the exaggerated self-interests to a reasonable margin, it is the might of the club wielded by another bully, though the irony is manifest. A club is not the name of a judicious being named God — it is a blind force incapable of establishing moral equilibrium. The wielder of a bigger club does not tailor its use to the excesses committed by the other bully but uses it as a ruse enlarging his own domain of influence. It goes with secularism that one who embraces it will free float sinking into a reckless idolater of the self. A nation-state or a union of nations equally acquires this mental frame.<sup>27</sup>

Nationalism and its consort irredentism are early eighteenth-century developments in Europe that came fast once monarchies began to shatter under the impact of changes accumulated during past centuries. Mawdūdī deprecated nationalism for the ills it had brought to humanity. In its innocent origin, he thought, it stood for the nations’ right to control policymaking. But as the nationality concept consolidated itself, it replaced God in the public space, allowing national interests the status of the highest moral value. This must not be construed to mean that Mawdūdī was opposed to the concept of nationality. What he intended was to unseat nationalism from God’s place. In

his view, it was dangerous to substitute universal moral standards of good and bad with national interests.

Anything profitable for one's nation, even if it violates justice, or what old religious traditions considered as cardinal sin, became desirable and good. Likewise, anything that hurts a nation, even when it involves truth, justice and fair play or what was once considered as the summit of morality has turned now bad. In the same vein, asking a person to surrender his life, money, time, even conscience and beliefs without reservations perfects the measure for an ideal citizen. The management of the collective efforts gyrates around educating citizenry so that they could work for the greater glory of their nation."<sup>28</sup>

Equally troublesome for Mawdūdī is the secular concept of people's sovereignty. "In its contextual thrust the concept held high moral grounds by maiming individual and dynastic rights to rule over a large mass of humanity. It also had the right nuance of empowering people to shape their destiny. These developments, undoubtedly positive, formalized themselves into democracy, which gave rise to another concept of nations having their writs of jurisdiction that must bloom into full expression and not curtailed."<sup>29</sup> The problem, however, started when with nationalism they created another god. "With people seated in the public space, everything from morals to lifestyle, societal structure and politics became fluid. As the sole arbiters, the majority decided the underlying ethos. . . . Law is now the expression of the people's will, which they can make or unmake with sovereign exuberance."<sup>30</sup>

Mawdūdī defines democracy "as the crowning of the cumulative will of the people specified to a geographical location where the administrative setup is the vassal of their wishes."<sup>31</sup> With this, he thinks the triangle of calamity is completed. "First secularism unfettered them from the moral grid, taking the fear of God from their hearts, and reducing them eventually into irresponsible idolaters of the self. Then came nationalism, which blinded them with national considerations and hate for others. Now democracy saddles them with lawmaking while the administrative machinery takes upon itself the fulfillment of their utilitarian goals."<sup>32</sup> Concluding his theme, he asks the obvious: "That being the case, how could a nation with that kind of a mindset be different from a powerful rogue? What a rogue does at a smaller level, a nation does on a much larger scale. This obviously takes our comfort away, for almost every civilized nation is organized around secularism, nationalism and democracy, which pushes the world into the embrace of wolves, ready to bite and eat each other."<sup>33</sup>

The decomposition of the old world of values in the West as well in the East has left the new secular society empty, with nothing to bank upon other than the theories of the self. Whether it was Descartes' "canonization of the isolated ego," or Kant's "free self independent of a specified substantive

content,” or Weber’s methodological individualism which sees the existing social constructions as reflections of individual beliefs and attitudes, or Kierkegaard’s “aesthetic personality who possesses an overall ‘life-plan’ with no content but an empty process waiting for adventitious input,” the secular society more or less agreed on the concept of the self “as a rational master of the passions housed in a machine-like body . . .” This was radically opposed to the concept of the self “as an integral part of a close-knit harmony of organic parts united to the cosmos and society.” Released from its organic setting, the self became “a trump to all moral claims.” But the secular self, as it should have been, was not restrained, it was an avaricious self discordant with the imperatives of cohesion, unity, and sanity.<sup>34</sup> Tangled into its own web, the rational self was limited by its fallacies and finitude.

To combat the secular mind, Mawdūdī suggests return to the “middle path,” as humans cannot find the right kind of a path for themselves. This is certainly not a happy summation of man and his abilities. But perhaps history supports him: the redeeming features are missing in the human situation. Narcissism (self love), bohemianism (unbridled expression of raw instincts), and estrangement (hatred for tradition and authority), three strains of disease, have decapitated humans to render good to themselves. To understand this pathetic situation, Mawdūdī wants us to know that each human is a small universe within his or her self, which has resident mental and physical forces. He also has desires, emotions and biases as well as spiritual and instinctual drives. The societal setup that comes into being because of human interaction is also complex. And as civilization grows, it adds to the complexity. Again, the generous spread of material resources around him raises issues of ownership and distribution on individual and societal levels.

Because of their innate weaknesses, it is difficult for humans to give a balanced look to the past and come up with a life order that could be fair as well as conducive to human growth in the psycho-spiritual and material senses, which could do justice to his potential and solve his socioeconomic problems in an equitable manner. It should also assure the rightful use of material resources both for individual and civilizational needs to foster healthy growth free from damage to ecology and social imbalance. When humans appropriate leadership and become counselors to themselves, then certain aspects of reality, certain necessities of life, some problems awaiting redress get hold of their minds and they unwittingly begin to do injustice in other aspects. Life loses its balance and takes to the crooked path. Mawdūdī characterizes human effort to chart their course as futile and a waste of time. He disputes with those who consider the dialectical process as a natural evolution toward human growth. To him, this is not the evolutionary success path, but the bumpy road of misfortune that makes man tumble into one disaster after another.

Mawdūdī sees the rise of the secular mind as a calamity, and suggests a return to some kind of metaphysical framework, belief in the cosmic unity of man and nature, a balance between individual and societal rights, regeneration of the moral man, dilution of the rigid confines of nationality, a just world order in which the poor and the oppressed nations have equal respect and dignity.

For Muslims, Mawdūdī's message is to come back to the purity of their value system and clean their house by establishing the moral state of Islam so that it serves as a model of excellence for others and a bridge of understanding between the variants of humanity. This might be difficult, but the more there will be darkness in the world, the more luminous his aspiration will become.

## Endnotes

1. Brian Gardner, *The East India Company* (New York: Dorset Press, 1990), 219. The passage is worth reading as it demolishes the oft-repeated India-spread thesis that the British sowed the seeds of hatred between the Hindus and Muslims:

Ellenborough's intentions were peaceful, or so he always insisted, but his actions were war-like. No sooner had he extricated the Company from the fiasco of Afghanistan than the question of Sind [present-day Pakistan] became pressing. This was the territory through which the original invasion of Afghanistan had made its way. The local amirs, or chiefs, were despotic and cruel, but they cared for their independence. They controlled the Indus, which was the main artery of the Punjab, and the lower Sind was a rich, fertile area. They were also Muslims, and Ellenborough believed that the Hindus were the natural allies of the British in India and the Muslims the natural foes.

2. Mawdūdī, Abu'l A'la, *Tanqihāt*, "Hamāri zehni ghulāmi aūr ūs kay asbāb," (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1999), 6.

3. *Ibid.*, 9–10.

4. Mawdūdī, *Tanqihāt*, "Aqaliyat kā farayb," (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1999 edition), 103.

5. *Ibid.*, 111–112.

6. *Ibid.*, 105–106.

7. *Ibid.*, 107–108.

8. *Ibid.*, 106.

9. *Ibid.*, 120–121, 123.

10. In his life and even after, only a few dared to speak against his theory. Those who spoke were treated with irreverence. It was only in 1958, when the fifth volume of *Encyclopedie Francaise* carrying the peak scholarship of the French biologists came heavily upon the theory, that the Darwinians had the shock of their lives. So far, the Darwinians had taken refuge in biology, especially at the micro level, but when the prominent French biologists from Claude Bernard to Lucien Cuenot said "the theory of evolution is impossible," they lost their steam. Worse, the biologists reduced it to the status of a dogma. "Evolution," they said, "is a kind of dogma in which its priests no longer believe but which they keep presenting to their people. So much about a matter which it takes courage to spell

out so that men of the coming generation may orient their research in a different way.” See, Stanley L. Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), 288–289.

11. Mawdūdī, *Tafhīmāt*, “Darwin kā nazriyah-I irtiqā’,” 278.

12. *Ibid.*, 280.

13. Darwin himself knew about the problems with his theory. Chapter VI of his book under the heading “Difficulties of the theory” talks about, among others, the nonpresence of transitional forms. Repeating the objections of his critics, he asks: “Why, if species have descended from other species by fine gradation, do we not everywhere see the transitional forms?” He also considers these difficulties as “fatal to his theory.” Nevertheless, his response is that the fossil record is not yet updated. “Hence we ought not to expect at the present time to meet with numerous transitional varieties in each region, though *they must have* existed there, and may be embedded there in a fossil condition,” 158. Again on page 163, he makes a similar statement that “if my theory be true, linking closely together all the species of the same group, *must assuredly have existed.*” See Charles Darwin, *The Origin of this Species* (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, 1958). For Huxley’s statement, see p. x of the *Origin*.

14. Mawdūdī, *Tafhīmāt*, “Haygal aur Marx kā falsifah-I tārikh” (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1995) 17<sup>th</sup> edition, vol. 2, 264.

15. *Ibid.*, 265.

16. *Ibid.*, 270–271.

17. *Ibid.*, 272.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*, 272–273.

20. Mawdūdī’s concept of the crooked paths is certainly derived from the Qur’anic “suā’ al-sabīl.” But when Hegel talks of the crooked path, the question is where did he get it from? Is it from the Qur’ān? Nevertheless, it will be of interest to note that Hegel as paraphrased by Engel did speak of “zigzag movements.” For example, read the following from Engels’ *Ludwig Feuerbach*, chapter 4:

According to Hegel, therefore, the dialectical development apparent in nature and history, i.e., the causal interconnection of the progressive movement from the lower to the higher, which asserts itself through all *zigzag movements* and temporary setbacks, is only a miserable copy of the self-movement of the concept going on from eternity, no one knows where, but all events independently of any thinking brain. [emphasis added]

The difference between Hegel and the Qur’ān, however, remains critical: while Hegel views the zigzag movement as reflective of a society’s conflict within itself to overcome contradictions, the Qur’ān considers this waywardness a consequence of the conflict between Islamic and non-Islamic ways of life.

21. See Mawdūdī’s *Islam and the Secular Mind*, “The Subversive Principles of Western Civilization,” tr. and ed., Tārik Jān (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 2002) under print.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

26. Russell Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things — Observation of Abnormality in Literature and Politics* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1969), 17.

27. Mawdūdī, *Islam and the Secular Mind*, “The Subversive . . .”

28. *Ibid.*



29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. See Jan, Tarik, "Secularism: the New Idolatry," *Pakistan Between Secularism and Islam* (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies, 1998).